

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 4, 2022

General Daniel R. Hokanson
Chief
National Guard Bureau
111 S. George Mason Dr.
Arlington, VA 22204

Dear General Hokanson,

Thank you for all you do to keep Florida families safe. I write to request more equitable force and resource allocation for the Florida National Guard. As a former Commander-in-Chief, I have deep respect for all the Guard does to keep us safe. That is why I am concerned that the relatively low allocation of Guard personnel to Florida, one of the most disaster-prone states in the country, puts Floridians at risk.

For over 100 years, Florida National Guard personnel have courageously volunteered to protect their loved ones and neighbors from threats to our shores – both natural and manmade. Just in the past few years, Guard personnel have been activated in Florida in response to Hurricanes Matthew (2016), Irma (2017), Michael (2018), and Dorian (2019), distributing aid, overseeing evacuations, and serving as first responders to hard hit areas.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Florida Guard has also served a crucial role supporting our state's pandemic response, including through the Army National Guard's 256th Medical Company Area Support. During the beginning of the pandemic, the 256th MCAS worked quickly to augment state testing capacity, supporting the state's Community Based Testing Sites (CBTS) and training non-medical personnel to be part of medical teams. Over the past year, Guard personnel have provided similar support to the state's ongoing vaccination efforts.

As it relates to the Title X responsibilities of the National Guard, members of the Florida National Guard continue to serve bravely overseas confronting our adversaries and keeping the American people safe. As the home to three Unified Combatant Commands – CENTCOM, SOCOM, and SOUTHCOM – Florida and our Guard units are better positioned to support some of our most important national security missions, including countering Russia and China and combatting violent extremism. Just this past October, members of Florida's 1st Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment began a year-long deployment in support of CENTCOM, one example of the tight-knit relationship between the Florida National Guard and the numerous active-duty units and installations found across the state.

The deep relationship between Floridians and our state's National Guard cannot be overstated. In a time when our Armed Forces face widespread recruitment and retention shortfalls, the Florida National Guard is seeing no such issues. While 29 states did not meet their recruitment goals and

23 states did not meet their end strength requirements in FY2019, Florida exceeded expectations, achieving 116.2% of their recruitment goals and 101.6% of their end strength requirements.

The Florida National Guard is truly indispensable. Members of the Guard, some of Florida's best and brightest, are held to the same stringent standards as their active-duty counterparts. They bring a steadfast commitment to both serving their country and protecting Floridians, missions that go hand-in-hand. In any crisis, the Guard's leadership, training, resources, and professionalism are key. Simply put, the Florida National Guard saves lives, and they do things in our state that nobody else can.

As I remain thankful for the tireless work of the Florida National Guard, I am concerned with the lack of equity in how many Guard personnel Florida is allocated by the National Guard Bureau. Despite being the 3rd most populous state in the country, Florida's approximately 11,000 Guard personnel ranks 53 out of 54 states and territories per capita. In terms of sheer numbers, 12 states have more total Guard personnel but less population than Florida -- some with only a fraction of our population! That is wrong and makes Florida families, my constituents, less safe.

Florida is the fourth-most disaster-prone state in the country, and as such the Florida National Guard is regularly called upon during hurricane season. While Florida's Governor can request the help of Guard units from other states during a crisis, this assumes that those units would not already be assigned to separate missions under their own governors. For a recent example, as Texas was responding to Hurricane Harvey, Hurricane Irma was bearing down on Florida as a major hurricane. The help Florida would have needed to supplement our limited Guard personnel in the event of a direct hit may not have come as states with a surplus of available Guard personnel had already committed units to aid Texas.

With deep respect for the important role of the Florida National Guard as part of our Armed Forces, Floridians know all too well their importance during a crisis here at home. Providing a fair allocation of Guard personnel to Florida, a state with a heavy active-duty presence and a significant need for local disaster response, will better position them to carry out both of their key missions. I stand ready to assist you in whatever you may need to correct this discrepancy and protect vulnerable Floridians. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Charlie Crist
UNITED STATES CONGRESSMAN